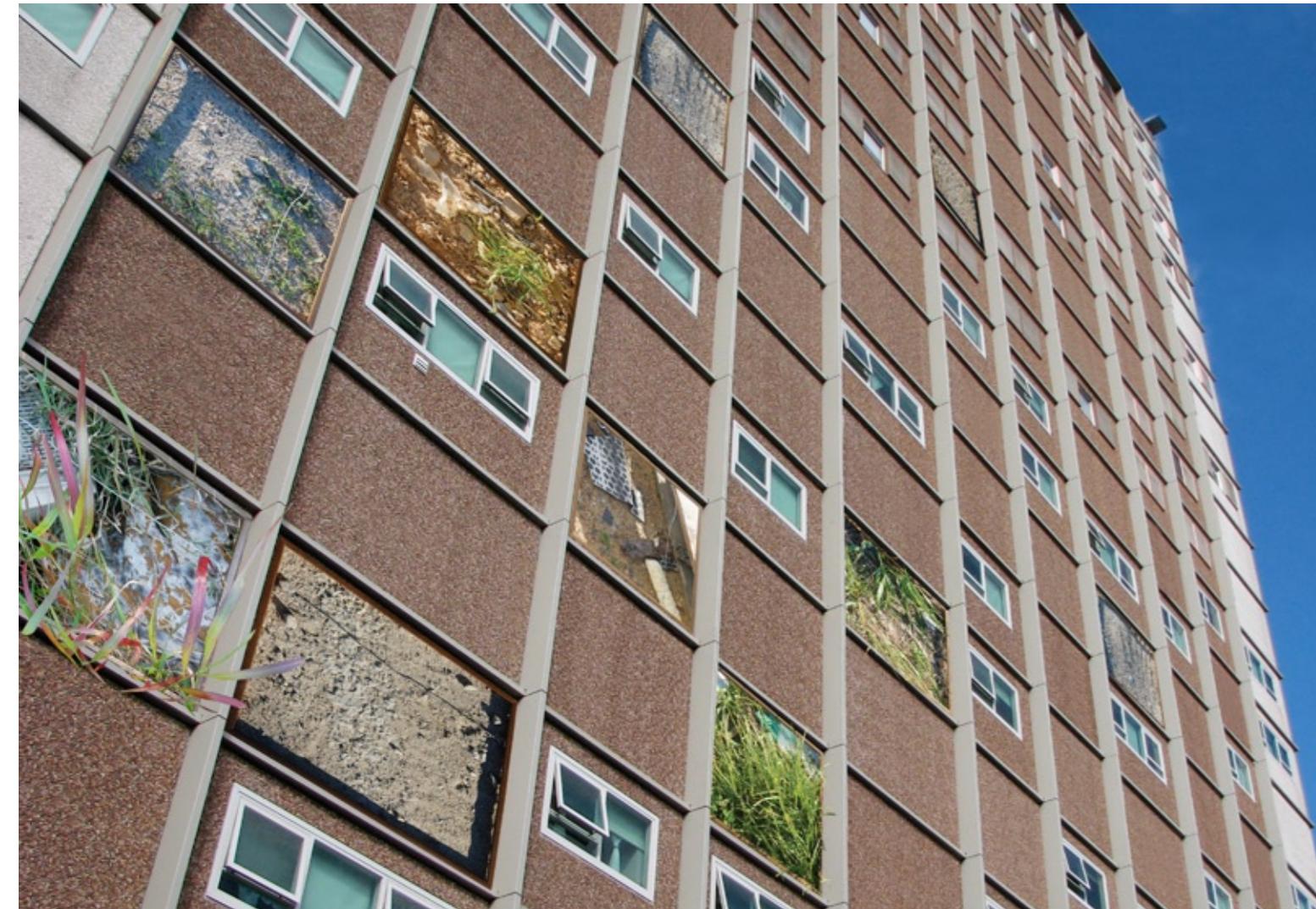


# after leaving the wilderness



a raised by wolves publication





During our five-week residency at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, we investigated a number of aspects of the vacant lot below our studio windows. These investigations included an ecological study of the plant life in the empty lot. Among other things, our study area contained ten different plants, eight of which we identified as common weeds: *Cynodon dactylon*, *Sonchus oleraceus*, *Malva spp.*, *Trifolium repens*, *Fumaria muralis*, *Agrostis capillaries*, *Plantago lanceolata*, *Medicago polymorpha*. We were unable to identify the remaining two plants (Specimen A and Specimen B). We also found detritus from *Quercus spp.* and *Eucalyptus spp.*. This investigation further indicated that statistically, the lot is likely to contain approximately 3.5 square metres of cigarette butts, 3 square metres of broken glass and 74 square metres of orange foam mattress. Forty-three percent of the study area was bare ground, nine percent is covered by *Cynadon dactylon* (commonly known as 'Bermuda grass', 'Couch', 'Bahama grass', 'Star grass', 'Kweek' or 'Doob') and six percent is occupied by parked cars.

# Vacancy and Occupation

## We want to be here

We are in a city. In essence, a city is simply a whole lot of people living close together. We live close together because of historical planning decisions, and because our houses are built in groups rather than as isolated units. We go to work, or stay at home, and get on with life. But when we bring a lot of people close together, exciting things happen. The term 'emergent properties' describes the characteristics of an ecosystem that are not explained by reductionist thinking – by breaking a system down into its constituent parts. Emergent properties, like 'exciting things', arise when the system reaches a certain degree of complexity. The exact nature of an emergent property is difficult to predict. A city has many emergent properties. In a city, communities form. Bands start. Shops open and so do movie theatres, bars, swimming pools, playcentres and libraries. People organise sports teams and film festivals. None of these things would be here without the complex interactions of the city, and the

nature of these things could not have been predicted. We like to be around these things, because they make us feel alive. High-density living, like in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, is the result of lots of people wanting to be in the same place at the same time.

## Spaces between spaces

Every building in the city has two faces. One face houses the inhabitants of the building, sheltering people and allowing for the private interactions of their domestic lives. The other face presents itself to the street and shapes the outer edge of a void. This void is negative space, between buildings, and is given over to the public. Even if access is officially denied through private ownership, an open space can be seen by all eyes. An empty lot can be wandered through. Everything that is not building, is ours.

The empty lot below the windows of Studio 18, 200 Gertrude St, used to be a community garden. There is a picture on the wall in the kitchen of the lot as it was before, divided by haphazard fortifications of sticks. The lot looks luscious and green and productive. From the changes in colour on the wall of the building on the far side of the lot, you can see the shape of the factory that stood here before the community garden – two triangular roofs, like the end of a long shed. In the photograph, the lot across the service lane is also yet to be developed.

## A community who gardens

A community garden feeds the people who tend it, and anyone else that receives or steals the produce. It can foster a sense of community. A community garden gives you a chance to know what you are eating and what went into it. Locally-grown food can reduce air pollution by cutting freight of fresh fruit and vegetables. The community gardens on Gore Street ceased to exist some time after May 1999. This is when the picture on the wall was taken. Melbourne still hosts community gardens - plots

of land are available to anyone for gardening at Ceres, the environmental education centre in East Brunswick. A community garden is also run at the Atherton Gardens housing towers at the bottom of Brunswick Street. The Australian Community Garden Index lists twenty-nine gardens, of varying size and exclusivity, in the state of Victoria. Community gardens can elicit strong emotional attachment, as seen in this plea to the council of New York City.

'parcels [the City] classifies as "vacant" are actually oases of green spaces that were reclaimed from urban blight by community volunteers. Abandoned lots, strewn with debris and garbage, providing havens for crime, were transformed by sweat equity and pride into places of scenic beauty. These special spaces have won places in the hearts of the people who built them and use them. Their destruction will destroy more than some plants, trees, and benches. It will rip the heart out of the community and be forever a reminder of the heartlessness of the nameless, faceless government bureaucrat who can so

easily turn a page, shuffle a file and so haplessly destroy a neighborhood's spirit' (Nemore, 1998. 'Rooted in Community – Community Gardens in New York City'). It seems that, to the 'community' who uses a 'community garden', a community garden is the answer to everything.

### **What is the question to which the answer is 'community garden'?**

Community gardens were set up in America in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Called 'Liberty gardens' during World War One, and 'Victory gardens' during World War Two, community gardens were promoted as providing an opportunity for citizens to contribute to the war effort by growing their own vegetables. In the United Kingdom and Eastern Europe, community gardens were set up on sites bombed-out or left derelict during the two World Wars. The community garden concept was taken up as an expression of 'counter-culture' during the sixties and seventies, and the gardens' focus shifted to increased environmental awareness and self-reliance (Warman,

1999. 'Community Gardens – A Tool for Community Building').

'In 1973 Liz Christy, a Lower East Side artist, gathered her friends and neighbors together to clean out a vacant lot on the corner of Bowery and Houston Streets. Calling themselves the Green Guerillas, these visionaries created a vibrant community garden and established the modern community gardening movement in New York City. As they developed the Bowery Houston Farm and Garden, they drew upon a rich array of resources both within their own community and in the city at large. Where other people saw vacant lots, the Green Guerillas saw community gardens.' ([www.greenguerillas.org](http://www.greenguerillas.org)).

There are now thousands of community gardens in New York, Philadelphia and Boston, as well as all over the world. These gardens are often on council-leased land and are dependent on the continuing support of local government. Community gardens are seen as providing

important shared open spaces. In a report written on behalf of community garden organisations in New York, residents argued that 'the preservation of community gardens in New York City would provide equity for urban populations chronically and severely underserved by open space' (Nemore, 1998). American community garden users also claim that community gardens provide a meeting place for people of different backgrounds, a playspace for children and an opportunity for city-dwellers to get back in touch with the land. In fact, their emphasis seems to focus on the social aspects of community gardening, rather than economic or environmental benefits. However, in the same 1998 report, the City of New York argues that leases to community gardens are terminated to provide land for affordable housing – a land shortage within the city means that lots classified as 'vacant' must be filled. The citizens have to choose between the promise of affordable housing - allowing them to stay in the area - and an amenity they see as 'the heart' of their community.

The community garden is an interesting showcase of the conflict between environmental ideals and urban environmental realities. Environmentalism has traditionally focused on reducing pollution of air and water, protecting human health and slowing down the destruction of nature. Accordingly, cities - as major sources of pollution and huge users of natural resources - have been viewed by some environmentalists as bad, fullstop (Berg, 2001. 'The Post-Environmental Directions of Bio-Regionalism'). Community gardens are part of this traditional environmental model because they encourage a perception that in a perfect world, we would all grow our own vegetables, which would be healthier for us, better for the environment and prevent the loss of important ecological areas to farming. This perception negates the high-density settlement patterns needed for a truly sustainable urban environment, as well as ignoring the environmental benefits of an economy based on efficiencies of scale. We need to stop thinking that the planet has room for us all to 'go back to nature'. The city will be the dominant habitat for the human species. We

need to stop thinking that the city and 'the environment' are separate. The city is the environment.

### A Growing Problem

Looking at community gardens in Australia raises a number of issues about urban gardening. Our first environmental imperative is the sustainable and efficient use of resources. A garden needs sunlight, seeds or seedlings, water, and labour. Sunlight is no problem. The introduction of any exotic plant to an ecosystem is fundamentally problematic, because of the needs of exotic plants for resources beyond those available in the natural system. For example, water. The need of exotic species for water is the primary cause of Australia's land salinisation problems. European crops get thirsty in hot, dry Australia – we water them. To do this, water is taken out of the river system and poured onto the crops. There is always a quantity of water in the soil (the 'water table') but as more water is added, the level of the water table rises, bringing the water closer to the surface. The water table dissolves salts from the soil, and as the water

table rises these salts are brought to the surface. The sun evaporates the water, leaving the salts deposited on the land's surface. Australian farmers watch as more and more of their land becomes unsuitable for growing exotic crops. Growing any crop that is so destructive to the environment needs careful consideration. Any garden needs watering. Salination problems aside, where would the water for an urban garden come from? A recycled water system could provide water for the plants, but a system like that needs expensive piping. Will rainfall be enough? Finally, who would tend the community garden? The people who may need cheap vegetables are probably working or looking after children, or both. A community garden is an opportunity for people to provide for themselves. But if the people who need the vegetables are unable to find time to grow them, then is the garden fulfilling its purpose – to feed the community who tends it? Even if people can find time to garden, will there be a net positive effect be on the health of the environment if gardeners don't address their car-dependency, or their production of waste, or their water

use? Then, there are considerations of whether the polluted urban space is an appropriate place to grow vegetables. The environmentally-friendly community garden suddenly becomes very complex...

Melbourne, Victoria and Australia have some huge environmental problems to confront. Finding solutions to environmental and social problems can begin in a patch of abandoned soil, but the solution won't come from this patch of soil. Nostalgia for out-dated environmentalism has no place in the city. I don't advocate the return of the lot to community gardens. Local context, national context, meteorological context, geographical context, biological context all have to be taken into account when deciding the fate of a plot of land. Brian Aldiss (writer) recognizes this need for a holistic view of problem-solving when he states 'Global warming has made ecologists of us all' (Frieze, June-July-August 2007: p.188).

### Garden of memory

But the Gore Street community garden, as it was, is still important, as part of a local collective memory. In 'You Are Here – Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination' (2004), Katie Davies talks about the phenomenon of the 'memory map' – guiding yourself through a city by what used to be there rather than what stands today. Even when new townhouses have been built over the land, people will know that a garden tended by a community (no matter who that community was), that fed a community, lies under the floor. Davies writes, 'I realise now what the Nicaraguan woman was saying when she told me to turn where the tree used to be. She was saying she'd seen a lot of change – an earthquake, a revolution. And that the tree that used to be there, it was missed.' The community garden remains, as part of a community's history, as a relic of what was here and the values of a group of people who once lived in this area.

History is what makes our cities interesting places to be. Think of this city as being like a richly-patterned carpet, laid over the bumps and lumps of the land. When we see bare patches of ground - like the empty lot - we are seeing where the carpet has been worn away. The earth underneath is revealed. But remember that the earth underneath the carpet is not in its pre-city, pristine state. There have been other carpets laid before the one we see today, and the ground in urban areas can be full of rubbish, broken plates and electrical equipment, and seeds. The community gardens at Ceres have had to confront that site's history – gardeners follow a 'no-dig' policy because the gardens are situated on an old landfill. To create a usable patch at Ceres, you must lay down newspaper, compost, and old carpet over the soil, to avoid disturbing the modern midden that lies underneath (Gardeners' Information sign at Ceres, 2007).

### The value of nothing

The empty lot still has a use. It is an interim space, used in unpredicted ways. A woman walks her two dogs through

it. A man waits. The lot is a shortcut, and a backyard. You could sleep in it. You could hold a party in it. The lot is who looks at it, as well as who plays in it. It is who walks by it, who hears the wind in the leaves of its three big trees as well as who enters through its gates or overs its walls. For people, for plants and for wildlife, the lot is a temporary shelter. It is a fragment of land that is not concrete or tarseal or house or tended exotic garden, or that pervasive monoculture, grass. The empty lot is a tiny fragment of 'wild space'. Suzanne Ermert (biologist) explains the special niche that a wasteland can provide.

'The term 'wasteland' has been defined as roadside areas or abandoned land, such as a previous industrial site, neglected garden or disused acreage. These sites are often hard, even more arid and more desolate than the pastureland areas. The weeds that inhabit these areas are real survivors, and although they are often despised as being 'bad' or 'useless', they have successfully adapted themselves to their wasteland niche' (Ermert, 1998:168-9. 'Gardener's Companion to Weeds').

The wasteland has wildness. The wasteland is a wilderness.

A lot officially declared 'vacant' by city planners will have occupants of some kind. An empty lot is an emergent property of a complex system – its uses are hard to predict, and its nature is hard to define. A lot may be occupied by different people for different periods. We may use it once a day, once a month or once a year. The lot is an exception from codified spaces we exist in, with restrictive uses. The lot is a shelter that does not keep in or keep out. It is a space that is big enough for more than one family or couple. It is big enough for more than one community. A lot may be a garden, or space for moving in, or a rest for the eyes. It is a space in a city, like a blank page at the end of a book. You can write your own notes on it. You can make your own signs of occupation. It belongs to no-one, and it is ours ☺

**Biddy Livesey** Wolf B

**Fragmentation and hodgepodge would be the results of following the book's proposals for town design in particular. All town residents must have easy walking access to impossibly many things (take a deep breath): the countryside, agriculture, a town hall, a high place, a sacred place, a neighborhood commons, a health center, residences for old people, bike paths, gravesites, diverse small stores, natural bodies of water, small squares, carnivals, playgrounds, street theater and games, animal pens, outdoor cafés, clusters of eating places, a mix of household types, travelers' inns, specialized and corner grocery stores, beer halls, schools, dance halls, birthing centers, workplaces, nodes of activity that gather and serve diverse subcultures, swimming pools, sports facilities, clusters of night entertainment spots, bus stops that are small centers of public life, food stands, places for public sleeping, and so on! Try drawing that in plan.**

*A Pattern Language* reviewed by William S. Saunders  
Harvard Design Magazine Winter/Spring 2002

## A landscape of possibility

Last Thursday, John and Mohammed both aged about 9, presented me with a paper bag filled with warm sweet rolls and insisted I try one immediately, 'It's the best bread around!' They watched eagerly while I bit into one and when I agreed that it was fantastic they offered to go and buy more with their own money. I'd met them both 10 minutes earlier.

The occasion was a 'You & Me & Everyone You Know' dinner party at the community centre on Churchill Avenue, Braybrook. John had come by and wondered why I was standing outside wearing an apron. 'It's very random' he said, 'I was just walking past and you invited me to dinner'. Yeah, it seemed that way. Random. But it wasn't entirely. The party had grown out of knowing that some kids round here get by on toast, BBQ Shapes and Five Minute noodles. Last year when I made films with a bunch of teenagers everyone wanted to cater for the screening, each describing in detail their favourite dish.

The fact is people get excited about eating together. It just doesn't happen often enough.

Braybrook can appear impoverished, dreary and even a bit frightening to people who live in better resourced, greener suburbs. The single-storey houses are mainly government-owned fibro and brick built in the sixties and the shops on Churchill Avenue are somehow precarious; an outpost at the edge of something unknown. A chemist, a fish and chip shop, a bakery that sells old world Australian cakes with bright pink icing, and a superette with advertising for cheap overseas calling cards plastered all over its front window. There's liberal smatterings of grafitti, and when the shops close for the night metal blinds are pulled down.

There are fights and break-ins. The community centre has had its windows smashed a couple of times and Charlie, a fourteen year old I spent time with last year relished

setting fire to the rubbish-bins in Skinners Reserve. As part of a film we made, she stood in the grandstand with an expression of great boredom and described lending her cigarette lighter to a couple of guys who used it to heat stuff up in a spoon. She called the police, who 'arrested' the guys and told Charlie off for smoking... At all hours there are kids hanging out around the community centre. For awhile, a seven year old petitioned to be part of the film-making group. Every time he saw me, he'd ask 'Am I old enough now?'

These details could be read as depressing –certainly there are kids around here who don't go home for dinner; the reality of their family life is just too bleak or their parents are simply absent. But in the last four years I've come to see Churchill Avenue as part of a landscape of possibility. A landscape of unexpected happenings and generous social encounters. Filming one Sunday, I alighted from a motorbike and was immediately invited to a 'fish and chip party' by the seven year old would-be film-maker. He was in a car full of his brothers and a bloke

with a diamante stud in one ear. I was tempted, but there was filming to finish...

In Braybrook it seems time and social terrain can operate differently; often conversations and interactions skip preliminaries. When I visited Jeremiah, one of the actors, to get his consent form signed, his mum was reclining on the sofa wearing a vibrant tangerine and yellow silk slip. She motioned for me to sit down and J's sister silently brought me a bright orange drink that was so sweet I thought my teeth might fall out. J's youngest brother lay on the floor telling me knock-knock jokes as he drummed my legs with his bare feet. I couldn't think of any good reason to leave for quite awhile; I'd been absorbed into their environment.

So it wasn't such a stretch to have a dinner party for 65 one Thursday. We added in a microphone because someone wanted to do a Whitney Houston solo, and a crowd of girls thought they might do 'free-style hip hop dance'. We bought some art materials in case people

might want to do drawings for the new youth centre that is opening over the road.

In the morning I took over the kitchen at my work and made lentil soup and spanakopita. Hilma and Mazna, who are sisters of 17 and 19 respectively, came in with their nephew Rishman (3) to help. Towards lunch-time, we got hungry and doubtful. As we brushed filo sheets with olive oil and cream, I worried that maybe Braybrook kids wouldn't eat the soup and Mazna worried about ripping the pastry. Hilma, who has an admirable take-it-or-leave-it attitude, reckoned people would have to be pretty damn sensitive to notice they were eating ripped pastry and that the soup tasted fine.

We needed more food for the dinner party. We boycotted Coles and went foraging. At Little Saigon I ate a piece of green mango dipped in fish sauce and chili and hovered over the mangosteens –those wonderful segments of pale delicate flesh encased in thick, purple rind. But in the end Colleen (my colleague) and I settled on bananas,

mandarins, grapes and pine-apples. We bought some obscure cheese from Cheaper By Miles –Lemon Myrtle and Indigenous mint. And twenty-six baguettes for \$6 from the bakery by the station. We pushed our trolley round Footscray marveling at how cheap everything was and the air smelled of a holiday.

John and Mohammed were the first guests. They sensed my 'Oh My God What If No-one Comes' anxiety and offered to go and recruit people. Rushing outside they approached a whole selection of strangers in high excitement. I'm not sure if any of those last minute invitees actually came, but an hour later others had: the room was filled with people of Ethiopian, Somali, Sudanese, Tanzanian, Samoan, Liberian, Egyptian, Viet, Chinese, Sikh and Anglo origin. Lots of people knew each other, but lots didn't.

Eliza arrived alone and brave, enroute to a disco. Eliza is 15 and is a wit. She's the author of a poem called 'How to be FOB (Fresh off the Boat) which is all about being

a Samoan and wearing lava-lavas, jandals and 'your cousin's girlfriend's brother's t-shirt' around Footscray. Once, when quizzed about career choices at school, she shrugged and said, 'I'll be a top gymnast and go to Harvard.' At dinner, she looked around and sat by a child who was eating by herself. Eliza's motto is 'It's all good!' I thought Harvard should be so lucky.

A boy kept asking where I was from and how long I'd been in Australia. He proudly listed all the countries his parents had lived in and I thought, 'Yeah, everyone's curious about origins and where everyone, including themselves fits in – it's part of that quest to belong.' Most people looked like they were settling into a sense of belonging as they helped themselves to spanakopita, soup, chicken and fruit. Someone's granddad turned up. Someone's friend from New York. Aida brought another pot of soup. A table of people in school uniform with Manga style hair cuts drew with great concentration only stopping to eat when some lasagna arrived with Mary. The hip-hop girls got up and invited everyone to dance. Trifle appeared

on the tables and was gone two minutes later. A small boy said, 'Goodbye everyone' into the microphone as he left. There weren't any fights. Just a lot of eating, and interactions that felt unexpected and joyful ☺

**Paola Bilbrough** is a poet who lives in the western suburbs of Melbourne. She works with communities to create films, dinners, oral histories and celebrations.



'Telling stories on the Skinner Reserve Grandstand' from  
*In My Shoes* directed by Paola Bilbrough & Hoang Tran Nguyen

## A tree is not a tree

Christopher Alexander's 1965 essay 'A City Is Not a Tree'<sup>1</sup> argues that the use of diagrammatic 'trees' - like a family tree - to map cities has caused people to consider cities as less complex than they actually are. This over-simplified city concept has contributed to cities being built in parallel, badly-connected corridors. Communities are isolated, usually along ethnicity and class-lines, reinforcing inequalities.

'In actuality', according to Alexander, 'neighbourhoods overlap, amenities serve multiple neighbourhoods and have to be supported by them.' Alexander advocates a city concept that does not create discreet suburbs radiating out from a central core, but organic spaces where housing, business and recreation interconnect, in a more 'complex abstract structure, called a semi-lattice.' A tree diagram cannot adequately illustrate the interconnections necessary in kind of city promoted by Alexander. Similarly, scientists have recognised that a tree is insufficient to

represent other complex systems, such as the ecosystem of a forest which has a canopy, understory, undergrowth, fungi, epiphytes.

The trees on upper Lygon Street are real trees, most of them green. But we noticed them because they don't look like real trees – they look like caricatures of trees, lollipop-like, Dr. Seuss-like. The trees look odd because their lower branches have been trimmed and they have been planted in individual square holes cut in the pavement. They are like tree diagrams, because they are isolated. They seem to have individual personalities, some bending some stumpy but they don't look particularly happy. They are trees without friends.

How sad to have no connection between below and above. But how much sadder to have a city with no trees at all. Even a scabby tree is a good tree. Trees are the cheapest way to make a city beautiful ☺







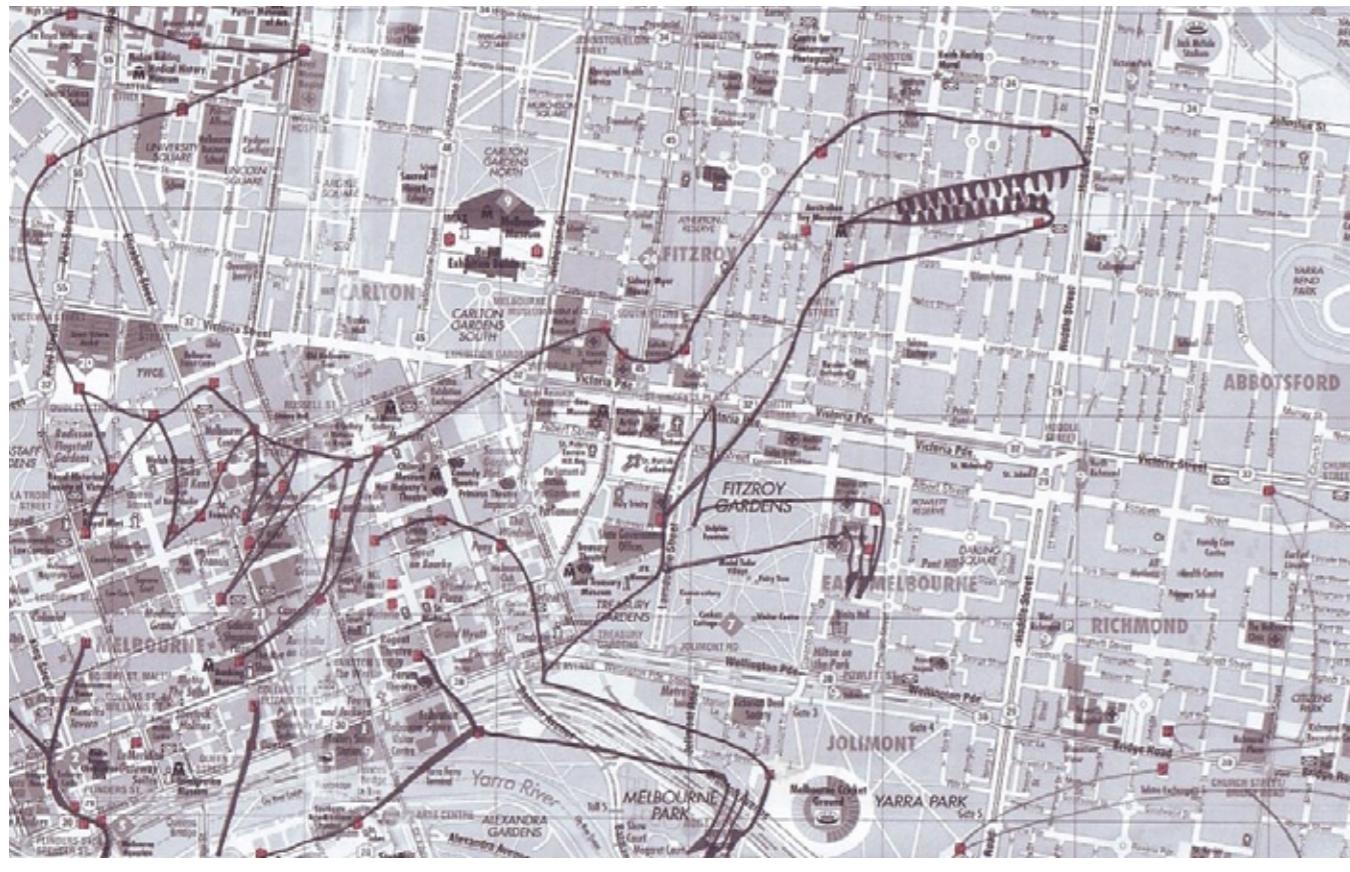
## Garden carpet. North-west Iran.

The carpet presents a bird's-eye-view of a garden in full bloom, divided up by a wide channel and water courses branching off at right angles in a style typical of historical Persian and Indian garden design. Square flower beds with stylised flowers are set along the edges of the channels together with even more highly stylised scroll-like borders. The forking arms of the channel are separated by verdant islands. Trees are arranged diagonally on every second island, shading the flower beds with their foliage. The work is executed with great attention to detail: fish even appear amongst the wave pattern of the water. Lovingly tended gardens were a luxury in the generally barren landscapes of the Near East. They established a contrast between wild dangerous nature and the idyll tamed by humans and enclosed within garden walls. In this spirit, gardens are celebrated in Oriental poetry and adopted as a motif by painters, whilst travel writers from the East also sing their praises. The common folk planted oases along river and streams, rich patricians and princes

transformed even recalcitrant terrain into paradisical park land scape by deploying irrigation systems. The close up portayal of a garden on the carpet carries the experience of the nature inside the walls of the palace – the carpet's dimensions suggest it was used in audience chambers or state rooms ☺

**Friedrich Spuhler**

Entry in Documenta catalogue 2007



Velociraptor constellation connecting parking areas in North East Melbourne.

## Why patterns make me want to stay: crafted spaces in art and cities.

Like any self-respecting artist from the periphery, I wasted a good amount of time reading art magazine articles that complained about the world's biennales before I had a chance to experience them myself. I knew that in Venice it would be too hot. That there would be too many lines, filled with too many people from the art world.

What I was not prepared for was the wonder of consuming mountainous wheels of free cheese. Cheese was provided at almost all national pavilion openings. The rounds of cheese - parmesan-type, hard and tasty - were over a foot in diameter. By the end of the night, when all the pre-freeed slabs had been eaten, we dug through the thick walls towards the rind with small shovels.

What you can prepare little for, Venice veteran or newcomer, is how to consume such vast quantities of art.

The first challenge becomes trying to remember what you have seen. Snapping digital photos quickly moved from ridiculous to necessary – hoarding eye candy to gorge on later. But even with a camera or catalogue to assist your memory, you still have to decide what you like.

There is a lot of art available at the Venice Biennale. Time and context are less available. I stood in the German Pavilion - giving breaks to the staff - for a total of about 4 hours, thereby spending 3 hours and 45 minutes more time with Isa Genzken's work than I did with any of the other artists represented in the other national pavilions.

Genzken, who has been described by Nicolaus Schafhausen as "one of the most uncompromising artists of our time"<sup>1</sup> requested a maximum of 25 visitors in the pavilion at one time. This meant that many visitors had

to wait for up to an hour to even step into the pavilion. Many people probably spent longer with the work than in pavilions where you could breeze in and breeze out. While waiting, you could contemplate the scaffolding covering the pavilion's exterior, hung with plastic orange temporary netting. This sense that Genzken's project was a construction site, a plastic-y facade, never really left me, even after stepping into the mirrored 'corporate lobby' entrance. After waiting in line, elbows out, for such a long time, stepping into this space and seeing yourself infinitely reflected was impressive and beautiful - as infinity always is. However, after moving into the large central room of the pavilion, you are brought down to earth by an army of assemblages. Lines of luggage with things piled on top of them. Wheeled suitcases with taxidermy animals stuck to them. Kitsch calendar posters of kittens. A poster of a painting of Venice, lying limply over a piece of luggage - the muddy reproduction contrasting with the zappy colour combinations of the trundle baggage - reminds you that travelling to Venice is like travelling into the past, but also like walking through a souvenir

shop. (The extent of this tourist focus is highlighted by architect Anthony Tung, asking 'Can Venice survive the success of its tourist economy? Is a city still a city when it is no longer a home to its people?').

Most of these objects seemed strange and foreign. But not because these everyday objects were slightly mangled and sitting in a gallery, but because it has become so rare to see luggage alone. Owner-less luggage is a bomb. Genzken's collection amounted to a small rebel army.

Threats to power, property, security were at the core of Genzken's installation, un-ambiguously named *Oil*. The positioning of astronauts high in the vault encouraged the viewer to think of the work as a global comment - a comment on our unwise overuse of oil, and the troubled times and places the hunt for oil has created. Stuffed animals accompanied by mannequins, played out the narrative of resource over-consumption and life in the time of space race. Mannequins wrapped in silver were cellotaped in an embrace that was anything but loving.

Genzken states that sculpture should have "a certain connection to reality. That is, not something fanciful, much less planned out, so out of place and polite? A sculpture is really like a photograph: it can be crazy, but it always has to have an aspect like the one reality has."<sup>1</sup> Genzken's installation was real. It was intellectually linked with the realities of the world, reflecting - metaphorically and literally - our mistaken, regrettable lives of trash, cash and kitsch back to us. But overall, my perception of this work was unified, cold, higgledy-piggledy pristine junk. The various material elements of the work were connected with a purposeful lack of care.

I found a different type of material connections in Jason Rhoades's installation in the Arsenale. Although 'tijuanatanjierchandelier' also had an assemblage aesthetic, the slap-on-the-sticky-tape approach that held Genzkin's chosen objects together so unsatisfactorily wasn't a problem in this work, because this assemblage held a collection of crafted objects, rather than a shopping-list of mass-produced shiny crap. The work,

despite its shambling shenanigans, created an inviting and enthralling space.

'tijuanatanjierchandelier' consisted of a collection of objects and neon lights strung from the roof of the pavilion. The lights spelled out slang names for female genitalia, collected by Rhoades and his sidekicks. The illuminated words created a strange light in the space. When I walked in, I didn't understand the 'obscenities' hovering above me - it was just another encounter with unfamiliar words, more foreign language mumbo jumbo. [Reading about the work after I had seen it, I found out what these words meant. I went back though the photos I had shot inside the pavilion. In the pictures, three long-legged good-looking prepubescent teens are sprawled on the mattresses under the work. I had taken the picture because the teens' age had made them stand out in the Venice crowd - anyone especially young or especially old was a rarity. Fittingly, I discovered I had taken one snap from an angle where I could see right up one girl's skirt to her knickers – See illustration overleaf.]

Even without knowing what the words meant, they glowed festively on the viewers underneath them and on the artefacts of all types that were strung up between the lights and lying around on the ground. Lassos and coiled climbing ropes, cowboy hats swinging between pillars and carved wooden labels, bunches of chilli peppers and stuffed boar heads. Sea shells and dried starfish set in rows. Extension cords, hide rugs, and a mattress with a stripy red and black rug flung over it. Jugs, lightshades and other wares laid out on market rugs filled up the corners of the exhibition. Rhoades has described art as a pilgrimage – “as an artist my job is to protect culture, and to figure out a way to protect culture.”<sup>1</sup> In this work, Rhoades has created a catalogue of chaos, a ridiculous stage set of gluttony, where the artefacts were not purchased ready-made from the two-dollar shop but were hoarded, from an eccentric cave. The installation was inviting because you could spend time looking at objects that people had spent a lot of time making.

I like art that is detailed and precious - art which privileges the production of objects, art in which the process of production is visible, art which shows the time it took to make or collect something, art which has a personality embedded in its connecting materials or connecting objects - art that bears the marks of its maker.

By creating a catalogue of precious cultural artefacts rather than just reproducing or combining the junk and clutter of our culture, the initial experience of pleasure leads to a more sustained dialogue that can then become political, a challenge to unsustainable culture. By combining these characteristics of production and materiality a powerful meaning and complex set of culture connections can be established. Care of production creates a care in response.

Collected rather than assembled, craft above chance, cast above cardboard, painstaking production rather than impromptu placement. Forget Duchamp and Beuys. Today, I want to worship the heaving lungs and



organ islands of Annette Messager. Oh! To study Louise Bourgeois's carved curves and the frightening weight of her Siamese cocks. I want to lie under the frisky detail and density of Jason Rhoades' neon chandeliers, not to stand in Genzken's work watching a dim guilty reflection of myself and my oil-guzzling ways in the brushed metal panels that line Oi's austere walls.

The crafted lassos included in Rhoades' work tell us as much about the injustices and obesity of contemporary capitalism as the space suits and suitcases exhibited by Genzken, whose old-style beat-yourself-up, literal austere environmentalism stands in contrast to the humorous anecdotal yet still thought-provoking, work of Rhoades. This maybe in part because, unlike Genzken, Rhoades was not representing a nation. Having died unexpectedly in 2006, Rhoades was not even representing himself.

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We arrived in Kassel in the late afternoon, and caught a taxi straight from the railway station to the apartment we staying at, on the edge of town. Before dinner, I went for a stroll to try and orientate myself. Down the hill, two blond women were screaming at each other because their dogs were barking at each other. I reached an overbridge where it was possible to get a view into the distance. I paused, thinking for a moment that I was looking at the sea. I reconsidered, and realised that it was not the sea that I was looking at, but the vast roof of an industrial building, silver, and reaching across the horizon. The evening light reflected off it, in the same way that the evening light reflects off the ocean.

Kassel is in the middle of Germany, surrounded as much by land as Venice is by water. While Venice is a city that is close to being overridden by its own popularity even without drawcards such as the Biennale, I would never have come to Kassel if not for Documenta. The city of Kassel seemed to know this. During Documenta, Kassel was promoted as having a single function – a home for

a mega-exhibition. From 16/6 until 23/9, Kassel had one cultural purpose, which in keeping with the times, was a large and multi-faceted exhibition, representing artists from across centuries and continents. Billboards all over the city advertised Documenta to tourists who were already there. Representatives from the Grimm Brothers Museum began asking tourists on the street if they had considered visiting their museum while in Kassel. Numbers indicated that nearly no-one had. The girls who served me in the chemist had little purple Documenta ribbons pinned to their white uniforms. They had just brought a new book, entitled 'English for the Pharmacy', and spent their time puzzling over it, between serving ailing art tourists.

The ridiculousness of these art pilgrimages was captured by one of the works in Documenta, Gonzalo Diaz's installation *Eclipsis*. You enter a dark room with a single bright spot focused on the wall. Walking between the light source and the wall, otherwise invisible words become apparent under the cast of your shadow. A guard

translated the sentence for me – 'You have to come to the heart of Germany, only to read the word "art" under your own shadow.'<sup>1</sup> Unlike most works of art about art, this work was interesting – it gave an intriguing sense of place. The work showed you the absurdity of the pilgrimage - when you come to a place just to see art, you require art to explain the place to you.

Other works in Documenta pinpointed a place, time, or ritual. But rather than dealing with the present, like Diaz's installation, these works were artefacts, bringing the distant past into focus. One work, a group of nineteenth century veils, called *Rubands*, 'embroidered by Ismaili (Islamic-Shiite) women belonging to mountain tribes in the Pamir region of Tajikistan...'<sup>2</sup> These elaborately constructed textiles were bound around brides' heads. 'Archaic abstract ornament, stars and diamonds as well as stylised cockerels are arranged in fields around a perforated slit for the eyes in such a way that a row of cockerels, shown in profile, forms the outer border of the entire veil.'<sup>3</sup> These objects are both aesthetic and

1 Oyarzun, Pablo. *Documenta 12 Catalogue*, 2007, Taschen. Germany. p234

2 Volker, Angela. *Documenta 12 Catalogue*, 2007, Taschen. Germany. p34

3 Gressel, Inka. *Documenta 12 Catalogue*, 2007, Taschen Germany . p484

culturally intriguing. The significance of the cockerel as a fertility symbol reveals the importance of the occasions these veils were produced for.

Craft, like art, has the ability to index change in a particular culture, country or city. Each object can be created from a design developed over successive generations, but with variations in ornamentation and pattern that encode a history of influences. 'In the 11<sup>th</sup> century Islam travelled over the trade routes from North and West Africa and brought with it a noticeable influence on textile production.'<sup>1</sup> This is visible in the Wedding Arras from Mali, also shown in Documenta, which although made in the last hundred years bear motifs dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.

Another magnificent example of antique craft was a gigantic carpet, from North-west Iran, depicting a birds-eye-view of a garden. Part abstract, part representational, the woven patterns depict another patterned system, a formal garden in which natural beauty has been coaxed

to grow in an unfamiliar place, and then organised. Confronted with this complexity, it is impossible not to think of the vast amount of time invested in producing these works. Time is a universally valuable resource. We appreciate time spent on creating objects, places and ideas, and through this appreciation we can connect across centuries and cultures, to other ways of life.

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The curatorial decision to include artefacts and craft in Documenta, alongside contemporary art, was a successful way to elicit meaningful and sincere investigations of alternative places. This focus on a sense of place offers a chance to craft, history and cities.

The attraction of Venice arises from its medieval history, but also from its exceptional integration of the urban and natural environments: 'the irregular configuration of the islands of Venice and its network of canals grew in

direct response to the natural flow of water within the estuary.'<sup>1</sup> Unlike other medieval cities such as Amsterdam, where the surrounding natural environment of marshes and fields was obliterated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Venice has maintained its pattern of streets, squares and connecting bridges. In a time when urban sprawl is increasingly recognised as unsustainable, it is a pleasure to be in a city where the urban pattern is created by its perimeter.

In artwork, careful construction and the use of patterns that reference cultures and natural environments of the past encourage us to consider the nature of our own society and the quality of our environment. These same concepts, transposed to urban design, help us think about the physical spaces in which we spend our time, and what kinds of societies they privilege and promote.

Many of the elements that make highly-patterned and crafted art successful can also be found in successful cities: attention to scale, use of valuable materials

and the celebration of aesthetic diversity. Spaces have multiple uses, and cities feel as though they are truly linked to their location – that they have grown organically, responding to pre-existing geology, weather conditions and ecosystems. Like the most interesting art, the most interesting cities are not didactic and simplistic. The most interesting places are complex, a jumble of interconnected and diverse elements. The best communities are not built around an artificial lake by a single developer but evolve over time around a group of people that have gathered for a good reason - a railway station, a harbour.

This theory of evolving cities is developed in Christopher Alexander's book *A Pattern Language*. Alexander promotes the importance of creating environments that fosters spontaneous cultural life. He believes that living spaces, whether public or private, are most successful in fostering culture when they are based on a pattern that has been 'crafted' by various uses. The best spaces are those that evolve over time, modified by the variety of

uses that occur within them. He believes the best places are created by a community, rather than being designed by a council or corporation plan. A town square is built because the townspeople have a habit of congregating in a particular space. A city is built in a border location to allow trade between two different cultures.

Alexander has been criticised because his patterns promote a certain kind of personal and social life – that of the liberal middle class to which Alexander himself belongs. His belief that new ideas cannot be as good as time-tested ideas is also controversial. It is telling that Alexander is more popular with enthusiastic amateurs building their own homes than with architects.

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Spaces of art such as Rhoades's *Tijuanatanjierchandelier* installation and the city of Kassel filled with the artworks of Documenta provide ways to visualise and connect to histories of place. Sites like these, assembling artworks in a crafted and considered way, inspire the viewer to care about the way we construct our own culture, and our own cities. Good art, like a good city, can index change. A good artwork or well designed city can preserve and celebrate the history of a place, rather than destroying history and replacing it with skyscraper spectacle – the homogenised architecture of global commerce. Both art and city can be a site of pleasure and parties. Both can be a place in which to reflect. Both allow us to consider what we find beautiful, and why. Both challenge us to ask how we can protect the continuity of our culture, while carrying our culture into the future.

People make patterns. We carve lines into grass by walking the most direct route through a park. We pass down the knowledge of how to embroider triangles to form a fertile rooster. Patterns are collections of our

activities over time. It is hard to dispose of our patterns – they lend themselves better to recycling. A pattern is not a flash in the pan. It does not record negative or unsustainable elements of our culture – just those that deserve longevity and reuse. A patterned city, or an artwork that acknowledges pattern, is a collection of the best movements and materials, ideas and objects we can muster. And if craft is an illustration of a good pattern, art is an example of how to live in that pattern ☭

**Amy Howden-Chapman** Wolf A

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Hunstman constellation connecting post offices in North East Melbourne.

...two farmers who were concerned about what is happening to the country and why.

The first, from Western Australia, spoke of our current approach:

'I spend most of my time working with plants and animals from somewhere else that just want to die, while spending the rest of my time getting rid of plants and animals from this country that want to live here!' The second, from Queensland, reflected on the past:

'If it had been Australians who settled in England, do you think we would have chopped down all the oaks, killed all the sheep, cattle and horses and introduced eucalypts, kangaroos and emus?'

Dr Denis A. Saunders (scientist) in Cunningham, Irene (2005)  
'The Land of Flowers – An Australian Environment on the Brink'

**Melbourne city once had a hill – Batman's Hill – named after John Batman, the 'founder' of Melbourne. Batman's Hill was 'a pleasant and wooded knoll on the north bank of the Yarra, west of Spencer Street'. The hill was flattened to form the area now covered by the Southern Cross railway yards. The elevated extension of Collins Street into Docklands mimics the slope of the original Batman's Hill. The construction of buildings up to the edge of the Collins Street bridge will create a new, entirely man-made 'hill'. Raised By Wolves would like to complement this process by gifting Melbourne our own, hand-made hill. Thanks for having us.**

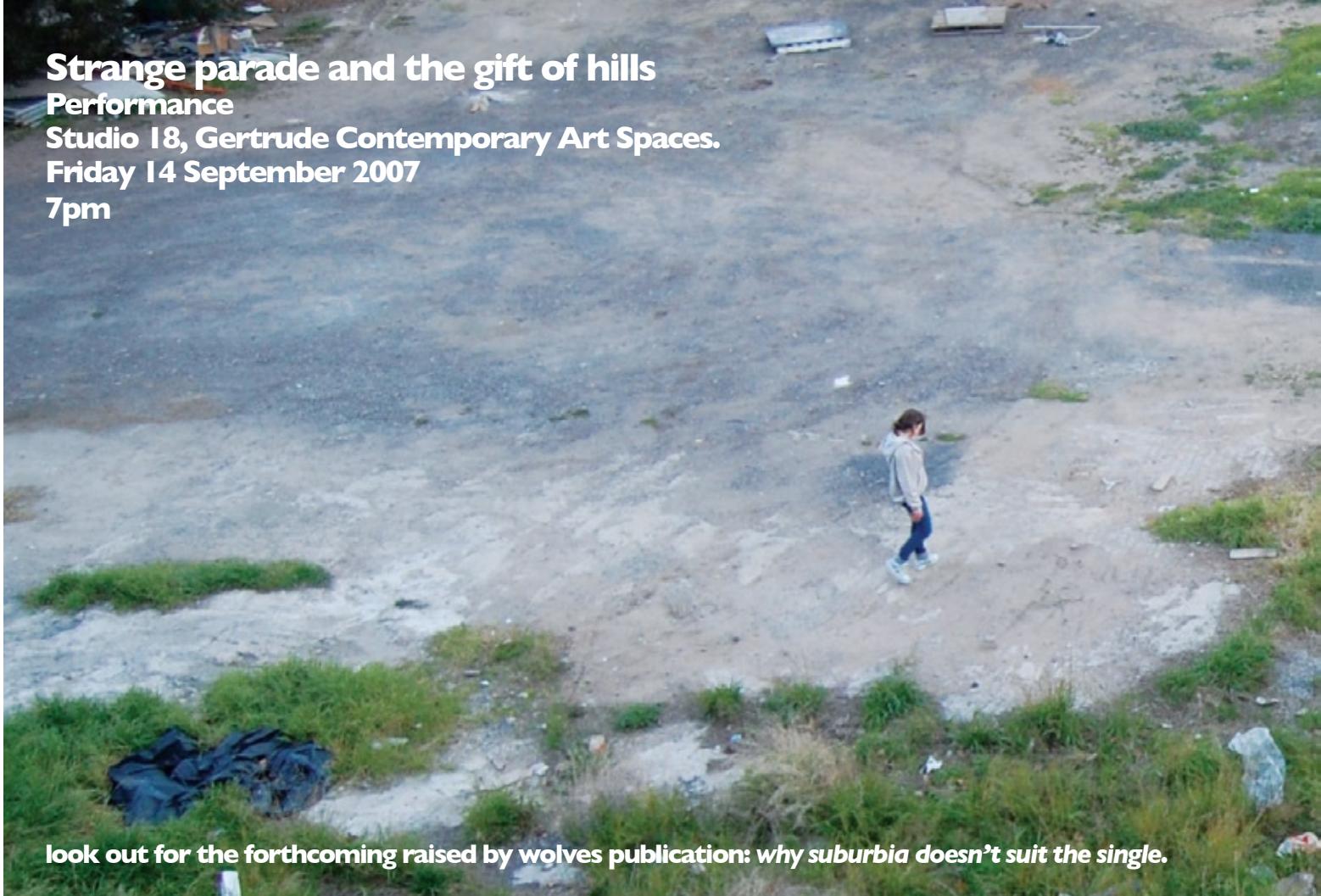
Raised by Wolves completed this project while in residence  
at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne  
August-September 2007.

#### **Contributors**

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Random numbers generated by Michael Lemmon.  
Publication design by James Findlater.



**Strange parade and the gift of hills**  
**Performance**  
**Studio 18, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces.**  
**Friday 14 September 2007**  
**7pm**



**look out for the forthcoming raised by wolves publication: *why suburbia doesn't suit the single.***